

Writing the hybrid:

Asian Imaginaries in Australian Literature

Doctorate in Creative Arts

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as a part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged in the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

I have also addressed the examiners' comments and incorporated them into the final version.

Signature of Candidate: 

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the representation of transcultural exchange between Anglo-Europeans and Asian-Australians. It presents my fictionalised autobiography/novel *The Fire Sermon*, and discusses its key influences: novels concerned with the representations of Anglo/Asian relationships and the “mixed blood” Eurasian subject. My exegesis explores my “factional” (or ficto-critical) methodology for writing about cultural hybridity, and considers the practice of *textual* métissage, an approach to writing about cross-cultural identities in an Australian-Asian Imaginary, which I define as a field of commodified, ambivalent, and anxious representations of Asian and Eurasian subjects.

This exegesis addresses the influence of touristic Anglo-European narratives of Australians in Asia; these include subjects who may “go native” in an Orientalist way. Demonised Eurasians also appear as “tragic” figures of split identity. These narratives make/unmake boundaries that signify cultural and racial difference; these address desire for and/or aversion to racialised bodies and minds, and I argue that these texts promote a nascent multiculturalism and mobilise hybridity as an intentional artistic strategy in order to deconstruct racism, but in the process may perpetuate stereotypes of the Eurasian, and may recycle dominant views of Eurasian hybridity’s cultural and psychological inferiority to whiteness.

I also explore novels that focus on Asian-Australian second-generation children and their migrant parents, in particular, how Asian subjects repudiate their own ethnicity in an effort to fit into Anglo culture. Contrary to naïve understandings of hybridity as undifferentiated heteroglossia, this thesis argues against perpetuating uncritical celebrations of hybridity as cultural mix-and-match within an idealised vision of globalised world culture where all subjects have equal access to the cultural resources available to fashion identity. The appropriation of Asian and Eurasian subjectivities may in fact perpetuate an uncritical Orientalist discourse that perpetuates the dominant ontology of whiteness. My story explores whiteness primarily through the voice of the Asian migrant whose desire to celebrate Western forms of identity waxes and wanes.

The last chapter appraises Brian Castro’s approach to hybrid identity, the debate over fact versus fiction, and the issue of authenticity in migrant writing. By adopting parody, self-Orientalisation, and métissage, writers can decouple the Australian Imaginary from hegemonic nationalisms and open the literature of migrancy to new, more fluid subject positions.